# Places of Power and Memory in Mesoamerica's Past and Present. How Sites, Toponyms and Landscapes Shape History and Remembrance

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## Introduction

This volume shares the insights of well-known Mesoamerican scholars from Europe, Mexico and the U.S. who analyze how power and memory are conceived through places, toponyms and landscapes in pre-Hispanic as well as in Colonial and modern Mesoamerica. They address the question of how places, toponyms and landscapes gained importance for people, and how politics and remembrance shaped them in the long term by addressing the underlying histories, myths and rituals and strategies in responding to new circumstances. Still today, the people of Mesoamerica, which includes Mexico and part of Central America, show a continued preference for places, towns or urban centers to distinguish themselves individually and as a collectivity, although they constantly reshape and transform those according to their political, religious or economic needs.

Mesoamerica's archaeology and history reveal that people inhabited a vast region of what is today Mexico and Central America from the Paleo-Indian period onwards (for at least 10,000 years), with the initial domestication of plants having taken place around 7,000 BC and the establishment of agricultural villages evident all over Mesoamerica by 1,500 BC (Adams 2000: 10). Important cultures like the Olmecs at the coast of the Gulf of Mexico or the Zapotecs in the Highlands of Central Mexico, just to name two examples, had by then established settlements with mounds, pyramids, temples and palaces as seats of power and memory that reflected their political and religious organization. From the common substrate of Mesoamerican ideas, beliefs and customs, it is the urban center, the community, town or village that since the pre-Hispanic period have served as markers of distinction regarding foundation myths, the enactment of rituals, the submission to particular authorities and ultimately the shaping of history and remembrance (Megged 2010: 6). The prototypes for such place-oriented modes of distinction, however, were natural places like mountains, volcanoes or caves, which among other topographical features were considered the dwelling places of gods and sites for renewing rain or corn. The occupation of land and the creation of a landscape was thus a ritual endeavor (Arnold 2001). Hence, single places or multiple places that

were ritually plotted and connected in a larger area gained importance for the people. The Spanish Conquest did not change this substantially (Lockhart 1982: 369). Local entities retained their importance because of their history and identity, modified only by the new rules and circumstances. If natives were forced by the Spanish authority to settle at a new place – within the so called *repúblicas de indios* or *pueblos de indios* (Indian townships) – the history of that place was largely invented and a kind of 'false' memory promoted by the elite with the intention to recreate their micro-identity (Florescano 1996: 268; Leibsohn 1994: 161). Landscapes were kept in memory, and rituals still performed in caves or at mountains. Even today, anthropologists can observe how communities in Mesoamerica shape people's identity (Carmack 1995; Monaghan 1995; Redfield 1930). However, this does not mean that the inhabitants of a community see their entity as a coherent one to which they should feel a deep loyalty (Sandstrom 1991: 140). Nor should a place be considered static or a form of 'closed-corporate community'. Rather, it always "emerges out of particular relations and interactions" (Monaghan 1995: 14).

From the viewpoint of seats of power and memory, pre-Hispanic and early Colonial places are mostly the product of the local elite, but do also have an impact on the collective consciousness of the inhabitants, just as their religious and agricultural experience and kinship. Mirroring the effects of modernity and capitalism in the contemporary world, urban centers and cities are today places of diversity – culturally, sociologically, economically, ecologically etc. – and they have become the focus of anthropologists and sociologists since the mid-1980s. It was even predicted that anthropological studies would be undertaken mostly in urban and complex societies in the future (Basham & DeGroot 1977: 415). Such urban centers are now associated with different metaphors expressing what these places mean, ranging from the ethnic city to the global city or the traditional city, among others (Low 1996). Metropolises like Mexico City or Guatemala City are examples of Mesoamerican mega-cities that have a geopolitical impact on the countries in which they are located. They absorb a significant part of the national population and all kinds of resources (water, electricity, food etc.), oftentimes to the disadvantage of other regions and in the brutal form of endo-colonialism. At the same time, they are constantly in flux, shifting their territorial limits (Azuara Monter, Huffschmid & Cerda García 2011: 11). In other areas, like modern China, the ongoing building of dozens of giant, partially deserted cities entirely from scratch and the occasional copying of complete towns or house blocks from other cultural areas, although not quite a new phenomenon, also calls to mind the function of power and memory. With cities either already inhabited or in the process of becoming so and constantly adding new heterogeneous populations, the people residing in them struggle to define themselves, as history and memory must be built as well. However, one must keep in mind that 'space', even if occupied and inhabited for the first time, is neither naturally given, as if it were a natural habitat in the sense of the

German *Lebensraum*, nor can it be regarded solely as socially constructed or invented. In the long term it is both and as such the result of a production that triangulates the natural habitat (biology), the conceptual idea (ideology) and the lived experience (sociology) (Lefebvre 1991). Therefore, there are good reasons to explore the different ways in which places and landscapes were formed and manipulated by politics and memory over time and the question how cities, towns or communities struggle to find their distinctiveness as particular places. Yet the two aspects – power and memory – are still responsible for shaping urban centers with a 'proper logic' throughout the world, although they do so less noticeably in daily life than they do in the long term (Löw 2012: 18, 65-68).

In contrast to landscape, land, or space, a place is something more specific, and its meaning depends on the historical and cultural background (cf. Ingold 1992). Regardless of the circumstances, a place is a distinguishable location, be it a city or a smaller area within a city (Chen, Orum & Paulsen 2013: 7). It is always shaped by humans, albeit in different ways, for instance by assigning to its space a particular or insightful myth-based name, by rebuilding and changing it, by hosting a ruling elite, or by making it culturally more attractive, economically more prosperous, or politically more influential. A place can be studied from a broad range of perspectives and disciplines, among others from the viewpoints of city planning (architecture, geomancy), social life and institutions (sociology, politics), population and movements (demography), commerce and income (economics). Finally, places, toponyms and landscape are embedded within a process of communication that shapes and reshapes their meaning (anthropology and history); this is the approach in this volume.

Power is something relational between two individuals, but also between and within larger groups (Erdheim 2004: 102). Power can be related to memory, especially if it is thought of more in the form of domination (*Herrschaft*) in the Weberian sense and less in its theoretical conception (as *Macht*). The struggle for the interpretation of a place's past and its future always expresses the power relations among groups, whether they dominate or not. Memory, the second important element that is constitutive for understanding a place's history, refers to the forms of how people recollect, organize, interpret, recognize and re-enact knowledge about past events under particular circumstances, traditional or new. A place can be arranged or structured by different memory principles and it can itself become a mnemo-technique as well (Yates 1974: 2). In this sense, a place is a physical unit of a collective understanding of shared experiences and principles, albeit an ephemeral one. In contrast to memory, remembering produces knowledge about oneself or others, based on perceptions that are transformed into memory (Fabian 1999: 68). While memory expresses the form and its content, remembrance is an act that produces ideas about the world in constant exchange with the past through words, text, images, bodily performance, food or other items.

Memory is regarded as distinct from history since historical truth exists independently of remembering (Connerton 1989: 14; Le Goff 1999: 11). However, as memory itself may be used by a society to perceive certain aims, the organization of memory influences how societies reconstruct their past and design their future (Confino 1997: 1403). Nevertheless, there are constraints under which memory operates, since the past remains a 'scarce resource' and sets limits to the free use of symbols (Appadurai 1981: 201). These constraints are related to the authority over the sources of the past, the continuity of or consensus about the nature of the relation to these sources, the depth, and the interdependence between the different pasts. Groups may strategically reshape the past or invent traditions according to their aims of controlling others or identifying themselves, and they may try to manipulate the past arbitrarily. As a scarce resource, people keep the past alive but not only for instrumental reasons (Misztal 2003: 68). It is negotiated between different groups – although they are neither closed nor homogenous – and accepted by them in accordance with certain principles, even if under slightly different viewpoints. The organization of memory involves different instruments (oral, ritual, writing, images) and sets of principles based on these instrumental constraints and it relates to forms like social, collective or cultural memory. Although memory regarding urban centers exists as discursive or architectonic practice and as space constructed and related to different experiences (Azuara Monter, Huffschmid & Cerda García 2011: 32), it is more than that. For in- and outsiders alike, it evokes what an urban center represents in its totality. This model is more enduring and less variable. Thus, a place, but also its twin, the landscape, may work as a mnemonic device on which larger groups base their memory (Ingold 1992: 154). In the case of landscapes, the semiotic signs are not so much buildings or monuments, but the landscape itself is considered to possess semiotic quality that converts the whole into a "sacred landscape" or "topographic text" (Assmann 1999: 60). A place, in contrast, may be confused with other places or times, although people relate to a place through memory (Bender 2002: S107). A good example from Mesoamerica is Tollan, the 'place of reeds'. It stands for a mythical place that was literally replicated throughout the region as different sites were related to or said to be Tollan (Aké and Copán in the Maya area, Xochicalco, Cholollan and Tenochtitlan in Central Mexico). At the same time, it refers to the important urban center of Tula at the end of the first millennium BC. In the case of Tollan, the process of transmitting images generated remembrance (Melion & Küchler 1991: 3-7). But not only larger groups or societies organize the past, memory also helps them to organize the present and also the future in the light of significant experiences. Taken as a turning point, the present will then become the subject of rearranging social, collective or cultural enactments either by re-constructing a lost continuity, by beginning a new collective identity or 'new era', or by accepting the past and reinterpreting it constantly (Cavalli 1997: 457). Another

strategy is forgetting, which as the counterpart of memory is an art in its own right but less easily recognizable (Weinrich 2005). Rather than being a failure to remember, this forgetting is brutally organized and entails a "repressive erasure", "prescriptive" or simply a "planned obsolescence" (Connerton 2008: 62-65). In 'nation building' the act of forgetting is even far more important a prerequisite to shaping collectiveness, since some events or places may represent a threat to unity and must therefore be eliminated by collective amnesia (Misztal 2003: 17). In the light of these implications, memory is elusive and far from easy to describe, so that it can be grasped only from a specific viewpoint. In the present volume, this will be to consider political and religious power and willingness.

## Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica

Modern scholars generally ascribe archaeological sites in Mesoamerica to different cultures or cultural areas, taking into account their architecture, ceramics, writing, iconography or burial practices, among other features. Examples are Tikal related to the Maya, Tilantongo to the Mixtecs or Tenochtitlan to the Mexica (or Aztecs). In contrast to these and other cultural correlates, there are important culturally linked sites as well, like Cholollan, Teotihuacan or the already mentioned Tula that are solely representative for a particular culture, as no hinterland or regional affiliation is archaeologically or historically recognizable. For Mesoamerica, as for ancient Greece, these sites are considered city-states, with the city-state cultures having a language, writing or other important cultural aspects in common (Hansen 2000: 19; Smith & Schreiber 2006: 7). The question of how the perspective changes if a place or a city-state is understood in a wider spatial context can be answered only when a political landscape that considers sites meaningfully arranged on the basis of existing relations of power is accepted (Smith 2003: 72-77). Hence, archaeologists investigate physical entities like houses, altars and monuments to understand their co-relation as a manifestation of power (Schortman & Urban 2011: 6). Within these city-states or urban centers, burial practices, the deposition of artifacts and other rituals turn smaller units like domestic spaces into 'places of social memory'; they constitute memory communities that may even have been in competition (Hendon 2010: 236).

Toponyms in Mesoamerica are represented in an array of forms. In most cases, however, they are indexical, i.e. referring to the idea of a mountain, a lake, a stream or a tree, and by this they probably reflect the already mentioned prototype that converts land into a place or into a landscape. In the case of the Maya from the Classic period (300 - 1000 AD), they are written in logograms, syllables or a combination of both which must be deciphered prior to understanding the meaning (Tokovinine 2008: 342). During the post-Classic period (from the eleventh century to the Spanish Conquest),

the overwhelming majority of Nahuatl-speaking people from Central Mexico (thus Nahua) represented their places by hieroglyphic or pictographic signs. They usually refer to the elements of their meaning, like in the case of Cuauhtinchan (*cuauhtli*, 'eagle' and *chantli*, 'house') or Chicomoztoc (*chicome*, 'seven' and *oztoc*, 'cave'). The same principle was used by the post-Classic Mixtecs, where stylized mountains, caves or temples stand *pars pro toto* for an entire place or town, or as a distinguishable feature for one site, as in the case of Tilantongo (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 2007: 128-129). In the case of the Zapotecs, there is a similar practice documented from the Colonial period on the *Lienzo de Guevea*. The document illustrates the boundaries of the town of Guevea and its natural landscape by placing the centered place glyph of the town (a mountain with three arrows) behind the ruler's image alongside other places from the local area in the form of a hill or mountain (Marcus 2005: 94). Similar kinds of representations of a site and its surroundings can be found among the Mixtec and Nahua in native documents throughout Central Mexico.

Apart from why and where a settlement occurred and who settled there, the place itself became the focus of attention and glorification. Around such a place, the people spun their history and myth, enriched by other important place names, either those of other communities within their marked identification sphere or those of natural geographic phenomena like mountains, volcanoes or rivers. The bestowing and legitimation of a ruler and his power by sovereignties from foreign places, as attested particularly in the case of ruler '9 Wind' from Tilantongo (Ñuu Tnoo) during the eleventh century in the Mixtec region is equally important in this context (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 2007). Another good example is the presence of an enigmatic figure from Teotihuacan in Central Mexico called 'Spear-thrower Owl' in the early Classic inscriptions of Tikal in the southern Maya Lowlands, in what is present-day Guatemala (Martin & Grube 2000: 30-31). As it was said at Teotihuacan, he may have been a ruler or the heir to a ruler who was married to a Tikal woman and later became father of a subsequent Tikal ruler. Although the complete story of the Teotihuacan presence at Tikal and elsewhere in the Maya Lowlands is still not fully understood, it is important to mention that whether it be a place name, deity or temple building, 'Spear-thrower Owl Hill' has been detected at some murals at Teotihuacan (Nielsen & Helmke 2008). Whatever the 'Spear-thrower Owl Hill' represents and whatever the Maya may have thought of it, it is of great importance to understand the relationship between the symbolic representation of places, history, and memory. Generally, the foreign place named either in the language of the ruler to be bestowed or in its corrupted or original language term ultimately represents the enactment that legitimized the local rulership and shaped the memory of that place. Teotihuacan, itself one of the most densely populated Mesoamerican cities in pre-Hispanic times, was a site that after its decline around 700 AD turned into a memory

place or *lieu de memoire*. By this, Nora (1998) defines the process that converts a living memory into memory shaped by history. It was this truncated tradition of Teotihuacan, the distance in time alongside the obligation to preserve it, that Aztecs paid homage to when they founded their capital Tenochtitlan in the Valley of Mexico during the twelfth century. As they did so, Teotihuacan not only became the place par excellence where the deities set the Aztec cosmos in motion, but they also copied Teotihuacan's cave-pyramid concept and street layout and made this model part of the underlying Aztec city planning (Heyden 2000; Marcus 2000: 68). As *lieu de memoire* Teotihuacan was a pilgrimage center and a place from where the Aztecs brought relics and copied traits in sculptural art (Matos Moctezuma & López Luján 1994). Hence, Teotihuacan became the second important place in Mesoamerica after Tollan 'where time began' and from which memory is preserved (Millón 1994), something that did not happen to the Maya sites from the Classic period, which had collapsed by the end of the first millennium, or to other important places like Xochicalco, Tajín or Monte Albán.

Before a place becomes important as a seat of power, foundation rites need to be performed. Mandatory among the Mixtec and Nahua were performing a fire drilling ritual and erecting a temple, building or altar-platform associated with a deity that would become a *pars pro toto* for the entire town to be founded. However, there were differences in the various rites performed by the different cultures – in the case of the Nahua, a deity or sacred bundle was involved, whereas among the Mixtec it was believed that the first people emerged from a tree and land was organized by repeating specific rituals several times in order to gain control over it (Boone 2000b: 550-552). Moreover the intimate relation between land and rulership was established among the Nahua by using ropes or cords and by the act of binding and weaving as suggested by the map of Metlatoyuca, where conquered sites are connected by ropes (Megged 2010: 143). By dominating other *altepetl*, the Aztecs developed imperial strategies that influenced the painting of the documents and the representation of places as seats of power and memory (Boone 1996: 181). As land was not purely a territorial phenomenon and represented an inventory of community boundaries or a jigsaw puzzle of ancestral migrations, it seems that territory in Central Mexico or in Mesoamerica could not exist without historical events puzzled together (Leibsohn 2009: 97-98).

In the case of the Maya, there is less documentation of the founding of places during the Classic period or earlier in the pre-Classic period (before 300 AD). Nevertheless, the much-referenced stele or altar binding ceremony of the Classic period may well be considered a reenactment of such an original foundation rite (Stuart 1996). Maya inscriptions also refer to an enigmatic and perhaps generic title (*wil te' nah*) whose wider implications point to rituals related to the founding of a site in which a tutelary or sacred bundle may have played an important part. Furthermore, taking possession of land and

cultivating it further required a ritual directed to the four cardinal directions, something that is attested to in the Maya inscriptions from the Classic period as well as in early colonial Maya documents (Restall 1997: 171, 190; Tokovinine 2013: 92).

Within a place, ceremonial life was based on the 260 or 365-day calendar (ritual and solar calendars respectively). These calendars structured the cycle of activities related to important places within the polity and the landscape including caves, mountains, volcanoes and other natural places of importance for rain, fertility and veneration (Carrasco 1991; Arnold 2001). Through time and ritual they were converted into a sacred landscape, thus becoming a memory map of religious and spiritual events and social life. The ceremonial landscape refers to natural places as well to others that are difficult to distinguish as either real or imaginary ones. As López Austin (1997: 51) summarized it, this is quite a problem in Mesoamerica:

> One of the serious problems historians of Mesoamerican tradition have to face is the difficulty of distinguishing among the toponyms in the sources as to which places belonged to the world of the humans and which did not. It is also a problem to separate these which had been confused by the Christians' lack of understanding, those which had an ambiguous identity even before pre-Hispanic times, and those which were ambiguous because of the determination of ancient historians to place form historical accounts on the shifting soil of myth.

Thus, places like Tamoanchan or Tlalocan among the Nahua, Wak Chanal among the Classic Maya or Yuhua Cuchi among the Mixtec are difficult to grasp in terms of their interrelation with real places like Tenochtitlan, Tikal or Tilantongo. Hence it seems that mythological and real places are best intercalated by the people themselves. Therefore, it seems better not to distinguish between real or fictive categories of toponyms, but to question how historic narrative and remembrance intervene in the mingling of these toponyms by constructing important topics of identification and collectiveness. These constitute a set of meaningful references that are reconstituted by remembrance before and after the Spanish Conquest. In this sense the term 'place' is preferable to others like landscape. Yet, as has been remarked recently, using 'place' in the Mesoamerican context means to include both the terrestrial and non-terrestrial locations (Maffie 2014: 421). Although in Mesoamerican terms a place is thus a meaningful unit that encompasses geographic aspects, human settlements or culturally constructed extraterrestrial locations, it is always time-related, as time and space in the Mesoamerican native view constitute an inseparable entity. Neither time nor space exists *per se* or in the abstract (Arnold 2001: 62, 130; Maffie 2014: 422). Hence, place-situated achievements exist only as time-bounded phenomena and relate to the cosmological cycle, while time-situated achievements are place-oriented within one open-spaced cosmos. As there is no equivalent occidental concept, this might best be understood as the existence of history as the product of space-time.

In a less broad perspective, a settlement becomes controlled by the elite through manipulating rituals at some point in history; thereby the space is simultaneously divided up and access to it is limited. Ancestor veneration, control of water resources or rainmaking are some of the crucial elements that played and still play an important role among the people in the Maya area and in Central Mexico (Lucero 2003; Boone 2000a). By war, marriage and political affairs the ruling dynasties were either bestowed with new places or forced to leave their original place and to settle down in a new territory. A prominent case are the Aztecs who left their homeland Aztlan around the eleventh century in search for a new settlement, later to be known as Tenochtitlan, and who during their pilgrimage transformed themselves into the Mexica on demand of their tutelary god Huitzilopochtli. As Patrick Johansson in this volume (pages 233-253) observes for the Aztecs, the Great Temple in their capital-site Tenochtitlan – devoted to Tlaloc and their chief cult god Huitzilopochtli – is shaped by the accounts of what happened at Mount Coatepetl, the place of his rebirth, during the Aztec pilgrimage when he led them from Aztlan to the promised new homeland. As documented occasionally, the ruling elite or their tutelary gods assigned particular names to the places that were recorded and written down. They constructed their history around these toponyms, gave special emphasis to certain foundational events and named themselves after the location. However, the ritual acts to give a new place a meaning and a foundation for a collective experience vary considerably depending on the cultural background of the group that is going to establish themselves (Zantwijk 1995). As analyzed by Viola König (this volume, pages 159-198) for Central Mexico, regional patterns of how places and landscapes became important seats of power and memory for the newcomers emerge out of Central Mexican migration stories. Although not only migration stories and their ritual acts were important to give meaning to new places, places became related to sacred actions and times and turned into sacred sites endowed with divine spirits and meaningful constructions throughout Mesoamerica. In addition, long established and well-known places were commemorated and strengthened as seats of power and memory by ritual acts. Often the ceremonial center is vividly remembered and constantly experienced precisely by a series of important rituals, as documented in screen-folded pre-Hispanic books. Thus, a place of memory emerges out of rituals constantly renewed and from mythological accounts that act as stimulus for remembrance (Graña-Behrens 2009: 189).

In Central Mexico, the *altepetl* (literally 'water-mountain') unified land and rulership over people, a core concept that the Spaniards later translated as *señorío* (Hodge 1984: 17). Each *altepetl* can be roughly understood as a city-state with its hinterland, governed by its own ruler (*tlatoani*), and divided up into smaller units (*calpolli, tlaxillacalli*). More important city-states could be referred to as *huey altepetl* – 'great altepetl' – and there are several other terms like *tlatocaaltepetl*, meaning that a town is ruled by a king, or

*tlatoani* or *altepamaitl*, which indicate that a town has 'arms or hands', i.e. other towns depending on it (Carrasco 1996: 27-28). Sites bestowed with rulership had their own history and other sites depended on them, although they were less important than the supreme site itself.

Among the Mixtec a settled place is called *ñuu* and each place name contains this word. In contrast to this general practice, important places result from the marriage of a hereditary lord and a lady and are called *yuhuitayu* (from 'reed mat' and 'seat/pair'). They represent the juncture of separate places (*ñuu*). This means that only places ruled by a royal couple were termed *yuhuitayu* and that the rulership extended to both places of origin until the couple died. This concept survived the Conquest and lasted throughout the Colonial period (Terraciano 2012: 395-396). It differs from the Nahua concept, where only the ruler or *tlatoani* himself is important and the origin of his wife's family did not automatically install him as a ruler over this site. Although there is no equivalent term in the Classic Maya inscriptions, the expression *chan ch'en* ('sky-cave/well') that occasionally follows a place name or appears in the iconographic register of a monument comes close to the Nahua term of *altepetl*. Apart from this, Maya sites can be distinguished by a royal title represented as an emblem glyph. Maya rulership existed long before the Classic period and developed distinctive attributes like receiving a special headband, a scepter, and being seated on a throne of jaguar skin (Houston & Stuart 1996). Most importantly, Classic Maya sites like Tikal, Calakmul or Yaxchilán established their hegemony over the surrounding areas and subjugated other towns (Martin & Grube 2000; Mathews 1991). The success of such politics leads to the distinction that some rulers used an emblem glyph that contains the word *k'uhul*, 'divine', while others did not (Stuart & Houston 1994). Similar to the Nahua case of mountains as indication of an altepetl, the Maya emblem glyph is somehow considered a reference to the city-state, with the emblem referring to the city and not to the territorial unit (Grube 2000: 553). Alternatively, it has been suggested to term it *ahawlel* (or *ajawlel*) (Lacadena & Ciudad Ruiz 1998: 41) according to the Maya word used for rulership. As Peter Biro remarks in this volume (pages 123-158), Maya emblem glyphs are place names and thus have a toponymic character, even though their historical origins may be different. Most importantly, they were the organizational principle of a collective memory for a community inhabited by humans and non-human deities. The analysis by Christophe Helmke and Felix Kupprat (pages 33-83) further supports this idea and makes it clear that one of the most prominent emblem glyphs in the Maya inscription from the K'anul dynasty from Calakmul has a mythological origin and refers to a cave or watery location where the Earth Lords beheaded the Maize God. Thus, like the Aztec in the case of Huitzilopochtli, the Maya at Calakmul selected a portion of the mythological account to highlight an important deity in order to give meaning to a place-name.

While the mythological place was recreated by real architecture in the Aztec case, in the Calakmul case mentioned here it was incorporated and constantly manifested as a royal title. Above and beyond that, the Classic Maya inscriptions reveal a wide arrange of classificatory schemas for toponyms, as analyzed by Sven Gronemeyer (pages 85-122). Not only emblem glyphs, but also locations – both real and fictitious – are mentioned; they show a certain syntax, morphology and semantic, something that has until now been underrepresented, although it seems that their structural variability is smaller compared to those of anthroponomy. Despite helping to gain more insights into the function and meaning of emblem glyphs, approaches as to how to classify the Classic Maya political units, from city-states to regional states, and to understand the territorial organization vary greatly among scholars (Rice 2004: 6-7; Tokovinine 2013: 57). It is also unclear if a ruler's marriage with a lady of another site implied political domination over her site of origin or not (Schele & Mathews 1991).

Taking these native concepts into account, the urban tradition in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica seems less comprehensible if one is using categories like 'regal-ritual', or administrative and mercantile center, just to give some examples (cf. Sanders & Webster 1988: 523). It seems more appropriate to look at how sites are embedded as seats of power and how history and memory shaped their image. Although archaeology provides evidence to reconstruct the structure and organizational principle of such sites, especially the use of space and its change over time (Smith & Schreiber 2006), the subtle message behind these principles cannot be fully grasped. Here hieroglyphic writing and iconography open new perspectives by documenting the most important toponyms in titles together with events or labeling spaces. As Angel Iván Rivera, Maarten Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez (this volume, pages 199-232) show for Mixtec place names in the pre-Hispanic codices, linking toponyms to historical places and their meaning by means of the Mixtec tonal language is an arduous task, albeit a fruitful one if carried out carefully. Thus, they are able to identify the post-Classic archaeological site of Huajuapan in Mixtec codices and also offer clues suggesting that Huajapan was part of a sacred landscape devoted to the cult of a specific goddess.

It is the use and manipulation of place names in writing and iconography by the local elite or groups that manifests how places became seats of power and memory. Although this may be considered propaganda in the political sense (Marcus 1992), from the viewpoint of memory this marks an attempt at distinguishing people or communities far beyond the mere dominance and temporal setting of political groups. In Colonial times, native pictography continued to be used to allow the copying or creation of land documents or maps (Boone 1998). Even today, the past and the ancestors can always become present through written or painted representations (Jansen & Pérez Jiménez 2007: 34).

## Colonial and contemporary Mesoamerica

With the Spanish Conquest native sites did not lose their history, but they did lose their legitimacy due to the new authority, the Spanish king. The native pattern of reaffirming their places and land rights according to Spanish colonial rules nevertheless goes back to pre-Hispanic times. Thus, the native elite continued to consider the place they formerly controlled autonomous and different from other places, communities, or towns (Lockhart 1982: 369). Since the Spanish Crown allowed indigenous municipal self-administration, albeit under Spanish supervision, and the reclamation of their land, battles over native places and land claims were fought in Spanish courts in New Spain, as the colony came to be named. The objective of all these claims was to restitute or retain land rights of communal or private character (Graña-Behrens 2011a). Most of them served to win land claims against the neighboring native community, to defend the interests of the elite and to memorialize the political affairs and the supremacy of people over land – perhaps with the intention to reutilize these documents after the Spanish or national episode of intervention ended (Smith 1973: 169). However, these claims evoked new strategies for rearranging native history into meaningful episodes for the Spanish authorities. Hundreds of maps known as *Títulos Primordiales* and *Codices Techiayolan* (either on bark, or European paper, or on cotton cloth) with thousands of place names, especially from the Mixtec, Zapotec and Nahua regions, were copied, repainted, carefully rearranged or in many cases re-invented (Arnold 2002; Florescano 2002; Robertson 1975). Some of them, like the so-called *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, are of mixed type with alphabetic text and iconographic scenes. Not merely centering on a single place (e.g. Cuauhtinchan), they illustrate the history of a wider region, and the origin of people from different places as well. In the case of the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, the document notoriously omits any mention of pre-Hispanic deities, although it does refer to the mythic past of the Chichimeca, a people who inhabited the most northern part of Mesoamerica (Leibsohn 2009: 40).

Place names in the native documents are centered on people and enriched by genealogies of the ruling dynasties, as in the aforementioned *Lienzo de Guevea*. Sometimes Spaniards are highlighted as allies or friends with the mere purpose of retaining the status of being important according to Mesoamerican standards of rulership and alliance. Nonetheless, there are notable differences among them. While the colonial Maya and their political geography have hardly been studied (Roys 1957), the colonial and post-colonial native documents of wider Central Mexico have been of greater interest in the past fifty years. Here, the natives either decided to hide their history from the authorities, like the Mixtec, or openly used it for land claim causes, as in the case of the Zapotec (Romero Frizzi 2012: 97). However, not all documents produced by natives for land claims during the early Colonial period show the same strategy of merging

places, dynasties and history. Thus, the Spanish presence was omitted or highlighted, depending on the underlying aims and self-understandings. Examples for the first group are the *Codex Cotzcatzin* or the *Mapa de Papel Europeo y Aforrado en el Indiano de Cuauhtinchan*, and examples for the second category include the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* or the *Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco* (Graña-Behrens 2011a; Wood 2003: 78). Like in nation building, forgetting or collective amnesia were used as strategies to rebuild or reshape the place identification. These are the strategies, or at least the reflections of political and historical circumstances employed by the natives, which greatly contributed to the social changes in the communities – either by forcing violence or by slowing down the process of transformation (Gruzinski 1991: 83-84; Martínez 1984: 185).

Among the colonial Maya from Central Mexico, there is no analogous strategy of reaffirming place-bound power and memory by copying, composing or inventing pictorial documents in the form of the *Titulos Primordiales* or *Codices Techialoyan* in order to retain land rights. At least among the Maya from the Peninsula of Yucatan, this might be a reflection of differences in the nature of place and land concepts. Prior to the Spanish Conquest and especially among the Nahuatl-speaking people in Central Mexico, there existed several forms of land possession, depending on the collective operating with them (Gibson 1964: 267; Harvey 1984: 84); the Maya considered only the individual house and adjacent gardens and the more remote fields in the bush to be important (Restall 1997: 206, 210). While Central Mexican pictorial manuscripts, like the *Lienzo Guevea* or several maps from Cuauhtinchan – just to mention two of them – show the principal place surrounded by other real or mythological places that mark the wider landscape, Yucatecan sources written alphabetically in Maya center only on the town with its trees, well, patio and plazas as symbolic expression and seat of political power (Restall 2001: 347). Hence, they refer more to the former seat of a royal court and later to that of the native municipal administration or palace than to the political and ethnic distinctiveness of the town and its people, as is the case in Central Mexico. The Maya town thus ended abruptly where the forest began, in contrast to the wider landscape embedded in Central Mexican documents. Another difference is that land among the Maya is marked or specified mostly by tree names, whereas in Central Mexico stone markers were used. Although this is still understudied, farming land for individual use could have been more important to the Maya than communal plots (Restall 1997: 208). However, the plots for farming (mainly maize and beans) were often far from the village. Hence, unlimited access to and the unrestricted use of the forest or bush were important. From this perspective, the so-called cast war on the Yucatan Peninsula during the second half of the nineteenth century was not only a struggle between rebelling Maya and the Mexican authorities over tax increases, but on a deeper level about a threat to peasant and communal autonomy (Reed 1964; Rugeley 1996). Peasant Maya first armed with

tools and later with rifles provided by Englishmen from Belize fought to gain a degree of territorial autonomy, mostly in what is the present-day estate of Quintana Roo. At the same time, they established shrines devoted to a living cross that spoke to them and supported their resistance in a mostly peaceful fashion after a few years of intensive armed fighting. These shrines mark a sacred landscape even today, although it has become overrun by tourism at the Caribbean coast. One of their demands was the unrestricted use of the forest or bush land and the use of their fields (Gónzalez Navarro 1979: 94).

The Spanish Conquest and period initiated a process of the reevaluation of sites and a new constellation based on the politics of the colonial authorities. Sites like Cholollan (modern Cholula), Texcoco or Tzintzuntzan lost their religious and political importance, while others like Tenochtitlan or Merida (Ti Ho) continued to be important to the Spanish administration. At the same time places like Antigua (Guatemala), Cuernavaca, Guanajuato, Morelia, Oaxaca, Puebla, Queretaro, San Cristobal de las Casas, Taxco, Zacatecas (all Mexico) or Tegucigalpa (Honduras) were founded by the Spaniards and transformed the Mesoamerican landscape in ways that have scarcely been investigated. Other native places were converted into *lieux de memoire* by the brutal interruption or suppression of rituals or customs whose meaning became newly arranged for the sole purpose of retaining collective identification with the past. Such a process can be seen in the native documents of Cuauhtinchan, Tlaxcala and Coixtlahuaca (Graña-Behrens 2011b: 123). Still other sites like Tenochtitlan were refurnished and re-used, first for Spanish purposes of power and hegemony, then for constructing the post-colonial Mexican state. Although it was designed to express the glorious past, the use of the eagle on the cactus, the original foundation symbol of the Mexica (or Aztecs) on the modern Mexican flag ultimately stands for the political elite's misinterpretation of the country's cultures, their places and identities then and now.

As in the pre-Hispanic period, places underwent transformations and redefinitions in the Colonial period and beyond. An ancient name or its hieroglyphic signs could change in one of two ways. It could have been changed either through corruptive Spanish pronunciation, writing, or misinterpretation or by different native sets of explication or additional information given for a particular place. In most cases, however, the original meaning was not completely lost, so that the memory of the place is preserved in its name. Cholula, which has the biggest pyramid constructed by pre-Hispanic peoples, is an example for both forms, being a pilgrimage site where lords from the Mixteca and elsewhere were bestowed as kings by the local priests and the feathered serpent was venerated. Although its original pre-Hispanic name is not attested in documents of that time, early colonial native texts speak of Cholollan, but mention other names related to the site as well, like the one for its great pyramid (Tlachihualtepetl). Spanish sources corrupted Cholollan, which led perhaps to the modern denomination Cholula. Accord-

ing to different colonial and modern interpretations, it could mean either 'place where water flows' or 'water that flows' or "place of those who fled or place where they fled" (Ashwell 2002-2003: 39). While the first interpretation points to an ancient natural name, the second one suggests more a mythic or historic event that may have been of importance later.

A second form implies that a place name could be enriched with different connotations, as in the case of the site of Cuauhtinchan. Its place glyph, which is mentioned in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* among other documents, appears to be associated either with military ambitions, with emphasis on its founders or with internal divisions, which suggests that different political identities existed and have been remembered over a longer period (Leibsohn 2009: 50). Similarly, the pictography for the Zapotec site or town of Guevea, which had already been reported and displayed on several maps elaborated during the early Colonial period, not only differs with regard to the signs involved, but also in terms of the associated meaning, which ranges from "hill with mushrooms" to "hill with leaves" to the "hill with arrows" already discussed (Oudijk 2000: 5).

Besides changes in the place name or etymology, another kind of transformation is how memory and power of places changed due to the Spanish Conquest and the historical circumstances that followed. Here, the transformation and remembrance of places as seats of memory and power varies as well. One example of how an indigenous village was transformed through Spanish settlement politics without losing its ancient memory about the place and the rights to rule is Momostenango, a K'iche town in the Highlands of Guatemala, which was originally called Chwa Tz'ak. After the Spanish Conquest it retained most of its late post-Classic boundaries and settlement arrangements as the head town of the pre-Hispanic province became the colonial center of Momostenango. At least two pre-Hispanic district towns were recognized by the Spanish authorities as secondary political centers (Carmack 1995: 29-33; 1998: 332). As a written document by the ruling elite from Momostenango for the Spanish officials in 1558 states, the province or 'lordship' (in K'iche *ajawarem*) was the most important corporative group that structured Momostenango society (Carmack 1995: 29). What the document clarifies as well is that the overall social and political structure in relation to land was engendered by genealogy and an ancestor cult that continued to be of importance for the administration of the colonial town of Momostenango and the ancient province. This seemed not to have changed substantially when the town center was moved from the pre-Hispanic location to the present-day location of Momostenango a few kilometers away after 1590 (Carmack 1995: 53-56). Even after the loss of land to neighboring communities in the course of the nineteenth century and despite a modern municipal administration at the end of the twentieth century, traditional authorities and structures still operate and are intimately related to the ancient places, sacred mountains, and the boundaries of ham-

lets closely identified with the lineages, although they are not without internal tensions (Carmack 1995: 56, 135, 277-229, 296).

Another illustrative example is the town of Anenecuilco in the modern state of Morelos in Central Mexico. The place's history and memory shaped local identity according to different circumstances, although in a different manner than in Momostenango. While founded as *pueblo de indios* a few miles from a pre-Hispanic place of the same name in the sixteenth century, it needed to be connected to the past. As the Spanish authorities initiated a process of land grants to communities (*merced de tierras*) in the early seventeenth century, a legal Spanish document alongside a map in the style of a primordial title was created. This act is considered to be the town's foundational act. As the circumstances changed, the inhabitants of Anenecuilco repeatedly tried to gain access to these and other documents at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, first by reclaiming them from the Spanish Crown and later from the Mexican government (the National Archive in Mexico City). The reason for such attempts was a sugar-cane mill established against the will of the people of Anenecuilco on their community land (Hernández Chávez 1993: 25-27). Incidents like this and similar cases still occur in modern Mexico, especially in Central Mexico, where places from pre-Hispanic times exist alongside settlements created by the Spanish Crown. As Ethelia Ruiz Medrano remarks in her seminal paper (this volume, pages 255-274) about present-day Nahuatl-speaking people from the town of Atliaca in the state of Guerrero, people are still willing to defend communal land claims which go back to either late pre-Hispanic, Colonial or modern assignment. They use and reshape local history according to their needs and circumstances to this end, drawing on testimonials like cave rituals or ancient books or codices. As in many other areas in modern Mexico and especially Central Mexico, communal land remains an important issue for smaller villages with inhabitants still heavily invested in or dependent on traditional crop farming. Their struggle for communal land and their strategy to access the history of their village by means of remembrance makes clear that they consider the village to be a dynamic, 'living' place, not an ossified entity. Thus, there is a double strategy behind the struggle for claiming their land rights: it means to connect the past with the present, ancient with modern life. This is what John Monaghan (this volume, pages 275-290) shows when he insists that the building of churches in several towns in the Mixteca region in Central Mexico after their inhabitants were able to purchase land from local patrons or *caciques* in the late nineteenth and during the twentieth century is nothing more than a program to enter modernity. Thus, communal land plus a newly constructed church, or conversely, the destruction of a church by neighboring villages, recall on the one hand the pattern of power and memory so important in ancient times, and fit on the other hand with the Spanish understanding of what a village needs to possess

in order to be recognized as a town or place of importance. In this sense, certain Mixtec villages entered modernity directly by artificially evoking foundational events from the Colonial period, like the construction of a church that political authorities have long recognized as a criterion entitling people and places with rights and distinction. But new political circumstances have also opened up new possibilities for indigenous people to reshape places and connect them to the present through remembrance.

Last but not least, modern cities like Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey (all in Mexico) or Guatemala City (Guatemala), just to mention the most densely populated and expansive urban centers in Mesoamerica which today are nurtured and confronted by capitalism and globalization, are widely recognized as the most important memory models for modernity, although this means at the same time that within the national boundaries inequality between these cities and the hinterland is increasing (Azuara Monter, Huffschmid & Cerda García 2011: 29). However, the multi-ethnic and historical recognition of people is a growing concern that affects small villages and mega-cities alike and contrasts with the dominating discourse of the modern city as a place-model of modernity since the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007. So the metropolitan zone of the Valley of Mexico which encompasses Mexico City and the surrounding state of Mexico is said to be the living space for 358 *pueblos originarios* or *pueblos indígenas* (Correa Ortiz 2011: 199). The terms *pueblos originarios* or *pueblos indigenas* indicate to people that they constitute a minority within the larger national population today and inhabit a territory that has roots going back to pre-Hispanic times (Noack 2011: 147). Hence, within the metropolitan zones and mega-cities, places are reevaluated in the light of politics and memory as the original people adapt constantly to new circumstances and needs. This has implications for how native people transform their socio-political unities and how this correlates to place (Correa Ortiz 2011: 207-208).

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